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ABSTRACT

C. Smith's "read a book in an hour" procedure for the development of listening and reading comprehension and B. Beyer's "hamburger writing" procedure for the development of composition skills formed the basis of a teaching technique that provided students with problem solving tasks, a procedure for writing compositions, and exposure to a classic adolescent novel within a limited time. The technique was used with 22 seventh and eighth grade students enrolled in a summer enrichment program that lasted only four weeks. The technique was used in conjunction with the novel, "The Day No Pigs Would Die," by R. N. Peck. The teacher introduced the novel by reading the title, showing the book cover, and sharing her impressions of the work. She next read the first chapter aloud and conducted a class discussion about the main idea, setting, supporting details, characters, and conflicts. Eleven chapters were assigned for silent reading by groups composed of two students each, with the teacher reading the next chapter aloud, and all of the students reading the concluding two chapters silently. Next, the groups shared their synopses of each chapter as the class discussed them. The teacher then introduced "hamburger writing" (in which paragraph parts are identified with parts of a hamburger) and students wrote two-paragraph compositions using the technique. Both the teacher and the students favorably evaluated the technique. (FL)

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ADOLESCENT LITERATURE AS A VEHICLE FOR DEVELOPING COMPREHENSION AND COMPOSITION SKILLS

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Adolescent Literature as a Vehicle for
Developing Comprehension and Composition Skills

Judy S. Richardson

Introduction

This paper describes a technique for combining the effective processing of listening, reading and writing experiences by using adolescent literature in a middle grades classroom. Some significant publications about the comprehension process were connected with two descriptions for guiding listening, reading and writing activities and then applied to two novel procedures to produce the technique. The participating teacher and students evaluated the technique as successful in promoting comprehension. Success was also validated by an analysis of the final composition content.

Review of the Literature

A brief review of the literature indicates that good comprehenders assimilate and accommodate as they comprehend (Pearson and Johnson, 1975). Good readers are more flexible in applying strategies which aid their comprehension and more integrated in their approach to comprehension (Golinkoff, 1976). Through a protocal analysis of reading strategies, Olshavsky (1977) confirmed that factors affecting comprehension are interest, reading proficiency, and author's writing style. These studies support the psycholinguistic position that reading is a problem solving process. Steig (1979), in reviewing several studies of comprehension, notes basic differences between good and poor comprehenders. When readers do not clearly understand the problem solving process, their comprehension is limited even when they can decode the words (Smith, 1967).

Cunningham (1975) has demonstrated how a teacher can guide children's comprehension using a directed listening activity which is then transferred to a parallel reading activity. The steps include: setting a prupose for listening; reading a selection to students; simulating the comprehension task which will be required of students after their reading; assigning children to read; having children complete the task as already demonstrated; conducting discussion. Smith and Bean (1980) explain how content area teachers can integrate reading and writing using a guided writing procedure which "encompasses the four communication arts with a focus on the essential skill of writing." (p. 293). These two guides facilitate the development of comprehension and composition by providing clear directions about the tasks.

Objectives

Middle and secondary grade students in English and reading classes are often required to read and then to demonstrate their reading comprehension by writing activities such as book reports. Yet, many students do not understand how to process their reading and writing to produce effective reports. In this classroom application, two procedures were employed to facilitate guided comprehension. The major objectives were to provide students with clear tasks for problem solving, a procedure for writing compositions, and exposure to a classic adolescent novel within a limited time. "Read a book in an hour" (Smith, 1979) was the main procedure for the development of listening and reading comprehension. "Hamburger writing" (Beyer, 1977) was the procedure for the development of composition.

The Setting

The participants in the classroom technique were twenty-two seventh and eighth graders enrolled in a suburban middle school summer enrichment program. Since the program was only four weeks long, five mornings a week, and included students from several schools, both time and diagnostic information were limited. Students

showed little interest in reading and said they had problems writing about what they read. The teacher introduced the technique as a possible solution. She suggested that the writing hint might be useful in their classwork next year as well.

Procedures

The novel selected was A Day No Pigs Would Die, which has high appeal to adolescents and contains short, action-packed chapters. The theme is mature but the writing style is fairly simple.

As the first step in the lesson, the teacher introduced the novel by reading the title, showing the class the book cover, and sharing how impressed and moved by the book she had been. (She did mention that the book contained some "strong" parts and "raw" language, which were not for emulation but necessary to depict this story setting.) She asked students to generate expectations about the book content and to share any experiences they had had which might be relevant to these expectations.

The second step was to read aloud to the class the first chapter. A whole class discussion of their predictions followed. Chapter content was discussed orally by identifying each of the following elements:

Setting	Main Idea	Major Supporting Details	Major Characters	Conflicts
Field	trying to help cow give birth	teased by schoolmates; got stickers in backside	Robert Peck Edward Thatcher cow/calf	Edward making fun; cow being born

Next, chapters two through twelve were assigned for silent reading by groups of two students. Chapter thirteen was assigned to a teacher; fourteen and fifteen were to be read by all participants after the sharing of two-thirteen. Each group was to read to identify the elements used during the listening portion of the lesson. The discussion in the small groups after chapter reading was lively. All

students understood the task, although a few groups required assistance to identify some elements, such as conflict. In such cases, the teacher guided their re-reading of passages and encouraged students to think aloud after the re-reading; this guidance was similar to Olshavsky's use of protocul analysis.

On the sedond day of the lesson, groups shared their synopses of chapters by writing the identified elements on the board as they described each chapter.

As the fifth step, all students read chapters fourteen and fifteen. The students then talked about their reactions to the book and to this manner of reading a book.

Sixth, "hamburger writing" was introduced by using a colorful poster of a hamburger and identifying: the top roll as topic sentence, the bottom roll as wrap up, the hamburger as the "meat" of the paragraph, and the condiments as the details and examples. Together the class identified the hamburger parts of this paragraph:

top roll	Michael skipped school
ketsup,	He told me he was going to do it.
lettuce.	Sharon saw him outside playing.
meat	He got caught by the principal.
bottom roll	The principal called his parents.

Seventh, students were asked to write a composition using two hamburger paragraphs, describing A Day No Pigs Would Die. Some guiding questions were provided if they elected to use them:

paragraph 1 - Respond to the activity of reading a book in an hour. Did you like the activity? What did you like best or least? Did it make you want to read the book?

paragraph 2 - Describe your personal reaction to the book. Did you enjoy it? Why/Why not? Did it have special meaning to you?

Evaluation

This lesson was not intended to be research oriented; it was an application of professional literature to classroom experience. Therefore, evaluation was con-

ducted informally by assessing the reactions of teacher and students, and by analyzing the compositions for use of hamburger paragraphs and for indications of comprehension.

Twenty students were present to complete the composition. Tabulations indicate that eighteen of twenty students applied the hamburger paragraphs; two simply listed statements. Seventeen students demonstrated comprehension of the novel by providing a theme statement or an example from the book; three wrote such general comments that it was not possible to determine comprehension. Sixteen students expressed favorable reactions to the lesson; four were unfavorable, as demonstrated in the selected comments below. Eighteen students expressed favorable reactions to the book; one did not care for the book (see comments) and one expressed no opinion. Although only three mornings of class remained when this activity was completed, the teacher reported that five students read the complete book during that time.

Three compositions are reproduced, as drafted, to illustrate the lesson more fully:

Tony:

> I liked this activity because we could tell you what we thought the main ideas was and we could explain what we read. I would like to do it again.
>
> This activity was fun and interesting because Mr. Peck said that he would never again put a weasle in with a dog. Robert said that no pig would die on this day. I liked what Robert said because he let no pig die on this day because his father died.

Anthony:

A Day No Pigs Would Die

> I did not like the activity because it did not have more action. If I could had read the book I would have enjoy it. But the activity did make me want to read the book.
>
> I enjoy the book because it have more action I would like read the whole book to get a good understand.

Kathleen:

I liked this activity because we learned about a new book. The way we did it everyone could learn about a book at the same time. The book made me want to read it. I liked the part about each person reading a chapter. I just loved the activity.

I would love to read the book. The part about when he got stickers in his privates was my favorite. I also liked the part about the pervert. I just hope I get to read the whole book myself.

Selected comments are included to demonstrate varying reactions to the activity and to the book:

If I had read the book by myself, I wouldn't have finished it.
I really liked the book. I wouldn't mind reading it.
I did not like the way we did the activity. I would prefer to read the whole book myself.
I wouldn't really want to read the book because it was sad and I don't like to read sad books.

The teacher was extremely pleased with the results. She felt that she had attained greater success than in other situations where she had assigned reading and writing activities. She has since used this lesson again with even greater satisfaction.

In the future, classroom research could be conducted to test the significance of this technique more objectively. Results of an assignment in which students have read a novel and then written a composition could be compared to results after read-a-book-in-an-hour and hamburger writing have occurred. In that way, the effects of guiding comprehension through listening to reading to writing activities, encouraging employment of effective comprehension strategies, could be measured.

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